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MAY

THE FORGED™

RUCKA · TRAUTMANN · HENDERSON · WOODARD · MAHER

WITNESS THE MANY MILLENNIA OF THE ETERNAL EMPRESS!
WEEP FOR THE FATE OF A FALLEN FRIEND!
WHOA! CRAZYJO GROWS A CLAW!

THE FORGED™

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STORY • ART

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For ten millennia, all of known space has been ruled by the **Eternal Empress**. For ten millennia, humanity has believed they were alone in the universe. They were wrong.

Called **"the Phobes,"** these aliens dwell in a separate dimension, one that the Empire has used for aeons for faster-than-light travel. Colloquially known as **T-space**–"transit space"–its use is the glue that holds the Empire together over the inconceivable light years between systems and worlds. Securing T-space means nothing less than the survival of the Empire, and the Empress Herself is willing to wipe out all life in the dimension to ensure her vision survives.

Cloned from the genetic matrix of their Empress are **THE FORGED**, elite soldiers bred to live and die at their Eternal's command.

But one of these teams has now gone rogue. **Scimitar-3**, led by warname **VICTORY**, supported by weapons specialist **CRAZYJO**, combat engineer **HAP**, combat medic **PUSHER**, and scout-sniper **HARPO**, have uncovered a conspiracy that stretches back aeons.

With the aid of a cabal of **CASSANDRAS**, psychics and precogs similarly grown from the Empress's genetic structure, Victory and her team now find themselves allied with the Phobes.

Labeled traitors, hunted without mercy by the Empire they once served, Victory must now win an impossible war against the Eternal, before time runs out for all who dwell in T-space...including herself and her sisters...,

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"SO HERE'S WHERE THINGS STAND.

"WE HAVE DEFIED THE WILL OF THE ETERNAL EMPRESS.

"IF IT HASN'T ALREADY, WE'RE ABOUT SIXTY SECONDS FROM THE ***MIGHT*** OF THE EMPIRE TURNING NARROW-BEAM FOCUS ON ONE THING AND ONE THING ONLY: FINDING ***US.***

"TO SPELL IT ***OUT,*** THAT'S THE ***ENTIRE*** SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM, THE ***WHOLE*** OF THE TECHNION SPHERE...

"...THAT'S DAVIAN AND ***ALL*** HIS UNSEEN HAND MOTHERFUCKERS, THE ANALYSTS, THE CASE OFFICERS, THE BLACK OPS BLOOD-DRINKERS. THEY'RE COMING FOR US ***HARD...***

"...AND AS WE FUCKED NOT ONE BUT **TWO** SEPARATE FORGED TEAMS WITH OUR ACT OF TREASON, YOU **KNOW** THAT THEY--AND **ALL** OF THE **OTHERS**, AND I MEAN **ALL OF THEM**--ARE GONNA BE LINING UP TO TAKE THEIR **SHOTS**.

"AND THEY **WILL** HAVE SHOTS TO TAKE, BECAUSE THE ONLY ANSWER TO TREASON IS **DEATH**.

TERMINATE FOR TREASON

"THE PRICE OF DEFYING THE ETERNAL'S WILL IS OUR **BLOOD**.

"THIS MEANS THE EMPRESS'S PET **COVEN** OF **PSYCHICS**--PRESENT COMPANY EXCEPTED--IS GOING TO BE ON THE JOB, TOO...

"...ROUGHLY ONE HUNDRED PRECOGS ARE GOING TO BE ABLE TO TELL THE EMPRESS OR DAVIAN OR VIPER OR SCYTHE **WHERE** WE'LL BE AND **WHEN** WE'LL BE THERE..."

...AND YOU KNOW THEY **WILL** BE THERE, WAITING, LIVE ON THE TRIGGER.

THE **BEST** DESCRIPTION OF THIS TACTICAL SITUATION, MY SISTERS, IS PROBABLY SUMMED UP **THUS:**

WE ARE *FUCKED.*

ELOQUENT AS *EVER,* VICTORY.

ELOQUENT IS FOR WHEN WE'VE GOT *TIME,* LADY CASSANDRA, AND TIME WE DO *NOT* HAVE.

AGREED.

GOTTA FIGURE SOME *TECHNION* GAVE THE *KILL-COMMAND* THROUGH E.V.I.L. ALREADY...

...UH, JO? YOU LOST YOUR ARM *AGAIN?*

I WOULDN'T SAY "LOST." *MISPLACED,* MAYBE.

=SIGH=

ANYWAY, THE ONLY REASON OUR ARMORS HAVEN'T GONE *COUNTERMEASURES* ON US IS BECAUSE HERE IN T-SPACE THE COMMAND WON'T *RELAY.*

BUT THE *SECOND* WE'RE OUT IN REALSPACE, *ALL* OF YOUR ARMORS WILL TRY TO KILL YOU.

WHICH MEANS WE'VE GOT TO *DITCH* THEM, NOW.

YEAH, BOSS, WE *CRACK* THESE THINGS OPEN WE'RE ALL GONNA *DIE.*

YOU AND THE CASSANDRA THERE MAY BE *EXCEPTIONS* TO THE RULE, BUT LIFE FROM *OUR* UNIVERSE ISN'T MEANT TO *SURVIVE* IN *THIS* ONE.

NO ARGUMENT, PUSH.

MEANS YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO DO WHAT *I* DID...

...YOU'RE ALL TAKING ON A *PASSENGER.*

I FUCKING JUST LOST MY ARM *AGAIN* I AM NOT FUCKING SWALLOWING SOME *EYEBALL* WITH A *TAIL,* BOSS!

NO, MAKES SENSE, THERE'S CLEARLY SOME MANIFEST SYMBIOTIC--

GONNA NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT JO'S ARM. ONCE SHE'S OUT THE SEAL WILL GO--

NO. DO IT *NOW.*

THE EMPRESS WILL KEEP TRYING TO *END* ALL LIFE HERE IN T-SPACE UNTIL SHE *SUCCEEDS.*

YOU MUST PUT A STOP TO THE EMPIRE'S ABILITY TO DO SO, OR ELSE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE WILL BE FOR *NOTHING.*

EVERY SECOND YOU *WASTE* IS ANOTHER CLOSER TO *GENOCIDE.*

CRACK 'EM, LADIES.

SCHLORP

OH, GROSS...

POP

SQUELCH

--FUCK FUCK OH SHIT IT IS IN MY *NOSE* WHAT THE *FUCK*--

SO FUCKING GROSS.

I'M NAMING MINE "LORI."

YOU'RE NAMING YOURS "LORI"?

I THINK IT'S A PRETTY NAME.

I DON'T THINK IT'S A GIRL, HAP.

GENDER IS AN ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCT, PUSH, YOU KNOW THAT.

GOD WOULD YOU BOTH JUST *SHUT*--

--UP HOLY SERRATED FUCKWHEELS WHAA*OW FUCK OW OW*--

--MY ARM MY ARM MY FUCKING...

...CLAW?

HUH. THAT'S... ODD.

ON THE ONE, ER, HAND, YOU'VE GOT AN ALIEN LOBSTER CLAW NOW. BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT'S ***COMPREHENSIVE*** INSTANTANEOUS CELLULAR REGENERATION AND REGROWTH.

THREE SECONDS, TOPS. ***WE*** CAN'T EVEN DO THAT AT OUR ***BEST*** FACILITIES.

TAKE US A ***DAY*** TO GROW YOU A NEW ONE BACK HOME...

...AND EVEN THEN WE'D NEED TO TEST FOR VIABILITY, COMPATIBILITY, FUNCTION...

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO DESTROY THE ARMORS.

I WILL SPEAK TO OUR *HOSTS.* IT WILL BE TAKEN CARE OF.

YEAH...

LOOKS LIKE A FUCKIN' CAN OPENER, PUSH.

NOT WITHOUT ITS USES, THEN, ESPECIALLY FOR YOU.

...SOME OF THEM MIGHT WANT TO SAY *GOODBYE,* FIRST...

COLONIAL ZONE FG-271, ANOMALOUS EXCLUSION ZONE JERICHO ALPHA
"THE SKULL NEBULA"

...READING AND NOTHING. SECTOR'S GONE **DEAD.**

HOLD ON, GETTING SOMETHING--

HEM 132009, ADAMANT PURPOSE, ON CLOSE PATROL, WAYPOINT 241-L

--BY THE EMPRESS'S PERFECT BREASTS!

WHEEEET

WHEEEET

WHEEEET

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

CAPTAIN NAGANO, MA'AM! PICKET ALERT, **RIPCORD** FROM **T-SPACE!**

SHOULD WE SOUND GENERAL QUARTERS? ARE THE PHOBES ATTACKING?

HOLD ON THAT. **HOLD.**

YOU SAID "RIPCORD ACTIVATION"?

AYE, MA'AM.

SCAN BETWEEN THREE-EIGHT-THREE AND THREE-EIGHT-SEVEN, ON THE BROAD.

SCANNING...

...POSITIVE, WE HAVE POSITIVE...MY GODS, CAPTAIN...

...IT'S GLADIUS-6 ALPHA...

...IT'S VIPER...

SISTER...

...HEAR ME.

I HAVE HEARD. I HEAR.

SING TO ME, SISTER.

I HAVE MISSED YOUR NOTES. I HAVE MISSED YOUR HARMONY.

WE MUST SPEAK OF WHAT MIGHT BE.

VICTORY LIVES.

SHE IS REUNITED WITH HER BATTLE-SISTERS.

DOES SHE SEE IT YET?

SHE HAS A SOLDIER'S VISION, NOT A GENERAL'S.

SOON, I THINK, BUT NOT YET.

IT MUST BE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT. TOO EARLY, THE EMPRESS WILL KNOW. TOO LATE, AND VICTORY WILL BALK.

THE EMPRESS MUST **NOT** KNOW.

SHE SUSPECTS, SISTER...

...AND THE EMPRESS IS ***AFRAID.***

LET HER BE. THAT FEAR WILL MAKE HER FOOLISH.

IT MAY...

...BUT IT MAKES HER ***DANGEROUS*** AS WELL.

SHE HAS ***ALWAYS*** BEEN DANGEROUS. HER MIND HAS EVER BEEN CLOSED TO OURS.

SHE MURDERED OUR SISTER TO SILENCE THEIR AMBASSADOR...

...ENDED HER SONG WITHOUT REGRET OR HESITATION.

WE ***KNEW*** IT WOULD HAPPEN. ***ALL*** OF US SAW IT.

AND THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO TO STOP IT.

NOTHING.

WHAT CAN I SAY, CASSANDRA?

WHAT MORE CAN I OFFER BUT THAT WE MUST NOT LET THAT SACRIFICE BE IN VAIN?

WE MUST BE STRONG. WE MUST CONTINUE.

SHE IS MORE UNPREDICTABLE THAN EVER.

THEN WE MUST HAVE DAVIAN.

HE IS AS CLOSED TO US AS THE ETERNAL!

HE VEXES US! EVERY FUTURE WITH HIM IS AN ***EXPONENTIAL TANGLE!***

MOMENT TO MOMENT, WE CANNOT SEE WHICH WAY HE WILL TURN!

WE NEED HIM, SISTER...

...VICTORY NEEDS HIM....

PHOBE ENCLAVE
SOMEWHERE IN T-SPACE

ARMOR DATA CORES AND RECORDING SYSTEMS ARE ALL PURGED.

ONE MEMORY BANK LEFT TO GO.

HARPO?

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE, HARP.

CAN'T LET SPOT'S SYSTEMS SYNC UP WITH IMPERIAL SYSTEMS WHEN WE HEAD BACK OUT.

SPOTTER RELAY: UNDERSTOOD.

IT'S GONNA BE OKAY, KID.

SPOTTER RELAY: THANK YOU, JO.

LOOK, I CAN PULL HER MEMORY CORE. MAYBE WE'LL BE ABLE TO RESTORE HER LATER--

SPOTTER RELAY: NOT WORTH THE RISK. I'LL GET IT DONE.

...SHE DID GOOD, HARP. IT'S NOT FAIR.

SPOTTER RELAY: AGREED. IT ISN'T.

SQUAD...

...GIVE RESPECT.

HEM 132009
ADAMANT PURPOSE
PATROL PATTERN
COLONIAL ZONE FG-271

--DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT--

YEAH. IT'S... TOO WEIRD, MAN.

I FEEL A POWERFUL URGE TO BE ANYWHERE BUT HERE, *RIGHT NOW.*

KUNG KUNG KUNG KUNG KUNG

MA'AM.

MOVING FASTERMOVINGFASTERMOVING

KUNG

KUNG KUNG KUNG KUNG

KUNG KUNG KUNG

DAMMIT.

HUFF HUFF HUFF

GOT IT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM, SCYTHE?

LOOK WHO'S UP AND ABOUT.

TOO MUCH A BITCH TO DIE?

AN ENTIRE TEAM GOES ROGUE, BETRAYS THE MISSION AND THE EMPRESS, AND DISAPPEARS.

FIGURED IT WAS TIME TO GET OUT OF **BED**.

I'M SORRY ABOUT CRASH, BY THE WAY.

FOR FUCKSAKES, STOP **GUSHING**, VIPER. I'LL GET ALL OVERWHELMED BY YOUR **SENTIMENT** AND **COMPASSION**.

YOU'RE PRACTICALLY A ROBOT, SO I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO FEEL... **ANYTHING**.

I THINK YOU MIGHT BE **VERY** SURPRISED, IN FACT. YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO LOSE A TEAMMATE.

FOR THE RECORD, I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT IT'S LIKE AND HOW IT ***FEELS.***

IN FACT, I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE THE ***ENTIRE TEAM.***

"EVER HEARD OF THE BLACKRAIN CAMPAIGN ON ERIDANUS-III?

"THE OP THAT WIPED OUT A FORGED TEAM?

"I WAS ***THERE,*** SCYTHE. THAT WAS MY ***FIRST*** TEAM.

"WE DROPPED AT DAWN, TARGETING ONE OF THE OPFOR'S UNDERGROUND BUNKER COMPLEXES. STANDARD DROP-AND-WRECK OP AGAINST THE ***BLACKRAIN*** INSURGENTS.

"THEY'D MADE ENOUGH TROUBLE TO WARRANT A BIGASS SMACK-DOWN, COURTESY OF MY TEAM.

SYSTEM COMPROMISE

"IT WAS ON THE WAY DOWN THAT WE FOUND OUT THAT BLACKRAIN WAS ***MORE*** THAN TROUBLE.

"TURNS OUT, THEY'D MANAGED A ***MAJOR*** HACK TO THE ARMOR--SPECIFICALLY, THE DESCENT ENGINES AND THE POWER FEEDS TO THEM.

EMERGENCY SYSTEM SHUTDOWN

"THEY'D MANAGED TO SUBVERT OUR SUIT A.I. TO TRIGGER AN OVERLOAD DURING THE BRAKING MANEUVER.

"BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. WATCHED MY ENTIRE TEAM EXPLODE DURING THE DROP.

"PURE LUCK THAT I WAS LAST IN LINE TO DETONATE, WHICH GAVE ME A HALF-SECOND TO KILL ***ALL*** MY SYSTEMS.

"THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE AN UNPOWERED HIGH-SPEED DESCENT FROM ORBIT.

"BOOM."

I WAS OUT OF HOSPITAL SIX MONTHS LATER, AND ASSIGNED TO MY NEW TEAM SIX MONTHS AFTER THAT.

AND YEAH, SCYTHE. I DID ACTUALLY FEEL SOMETHING. STILL DO.

HOLY HELL, VIPER. I DIDN'T... YOUR *ENTIRE* TEAM? I'M SO SORRY.

DON'T GET ALL ***DRIPPY,*** SCYTHE.

WHAT'S NEXT? WE GONNA HUG IT OUT? BRAID EACH OTHER'S HAIR?

NO THANKS. ALL I NEED IS TO ACCOMPLISH THE ***MISSION.***

THAT'S THE POINT: MISSION COMES FIRST. ALWAYS.

SPEAKING OF WHICH: NEW ORDERS. WE STAND BY AND MAINTAIN READINESS. WHEN WE GET THE NOD, WE MOVE OUT AND KILL EVERY LAST MEMBER OF SCIMITAR-3.

AND GET THAT HAND LOOKED AT. YOU'RE BLEEDING ALL OVER THE DECK.

BRAY VII ALREADY SENT THE DISPATCH?

ENCRYPTED, YES, AND YOU KNOW TECHNION ENCRYPTION, BUT I'M NOT SURE IT'LL MATTER...

...THE PHOBES AREN'T ***FOOLS***, DAVIAN. THEY'LL FIGURE IT OUT.

SECURITY?

ON THE GROUND? THE BEST THE SPHERE HAS TO OFFER.

I'VE ORDERED THE 11TH FLEET TO THE SYSTEM AS WELL, FOR ALL THE GOOD ***THAT*** MIGHT DO.

BUT OUR ***BEST*** BET IS THE ***INTERFERENCE SCREENS*** WITHIN THE SPHERE ITSELF.

HOPEFULLY WILL MAKE IT HARDER FOR THE PHOBES TO SLIP FROM ***THEIR*** UNIVERSE INTO ***OURS.***

THEY'LL NEED SUBSTANTIAL COUNTER-MEASURES BUILT INTO THE REPLACEMENT DEVICES, ADRIANNA.

COUNTERS A FORGED TEAM ***CAN'T*** BYPASS. THAT ***HAP*** CAN'T BYPASS.

YOU'RE THINKING THEY'LL TRY AGAIN?

ISN'T THAT WHAT ***WE'RE*** DOING?

FAILED TO KILL EVERYTHING IN T-SPACE ONCE, SO WE'RE MAKING NEW VOID-IMPELLING BOMBS TO GET IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME?

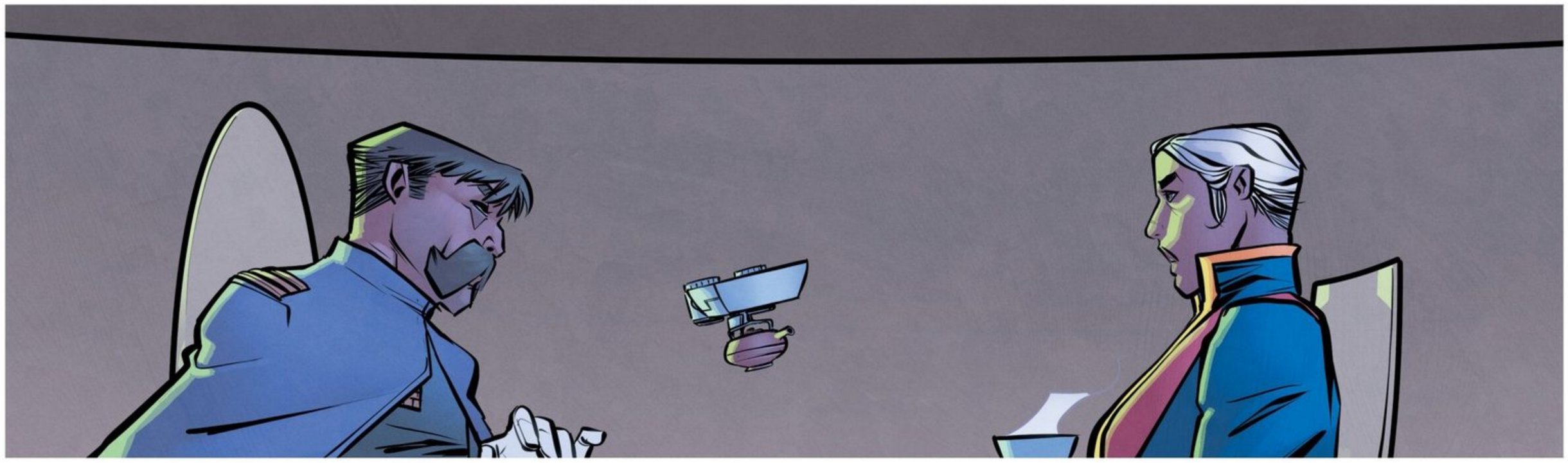
YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT, IT SOUNDS LIKE THE DEFINITION OF ***INSANITY.***

DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN EXPECTING A DIFFERENT RESULT.

I'VE WONDERED.

THAT'S A ***DANGEROUS*** THING TO ***WONDER,*** DAVIAN.

YOU DO, TOO.



I DO, TOO.

AND THEN I STOP BECAUSE IF SHE IS, THAT'S ALMOST TOO TERRIFYING TO CONTEMPLATE.
SHE'S TEN THOUSAND YEARS OLD, DAVIAN. WHAT IF IT'S NOT ALL AN ACT?

HOW CAN SHE NOT BE INSANE?

BECAUSE SHE'S NOT US, ADRIANNA.
AND THAT'S THE HOPE I CLING TO.

YOUR LIPS TO THE EARS OF THE GODS, DAVIAN.
I'LL KEEP YOU POSTED. THANKS FOR THE TEA AND THE TIME.
YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME.

ELSIE, I'M NOT TO BE DISTURBED.
CHK-KSSS
ACKNOWLEDGED, SIR.

CHK-KSSS
I SAID NO INTERRUPTIONS, ELSIE--
YOU'LL PERMIT THIS ONE, GENERAL.

I THINK IT'S TIME YOU AND I HAD A TALK ABOUT WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON.

ABOUT WHAT IS TRULY AT STAKE.

E-ETERNAL...

PLEASE, DON'T. IF I WANTED GROVELING I'D HAVE STAYED AT THE PALACE.

I'M HERE RIGHT NOW BECAUSE WE SHARE A ***CONVICTION.***

IN FACT, OF THE MILLIONS OF FUCKING ***TOADIES*** I FIND MYSELF SURROUNDED BY, YOU MAY BE THE ***ONLY*** PERSON WITH WHOM I SHARE IT.

ROYALTY ***IS*** THE STATE, YOU KNOW THAT. I AM THE ***EMPRESS,*** THUS I AM THE ***EMPIRE,*** AND THEREFORE TO SERVE ***ME*** IS TO SERVE THE EMPIRE.

BUT ***YOU*** DON'T BELIEVE THAT. YOU ***NEVER*** HAVE. ***THAT*** IS WHAT WE SHARE.

WE EACH ***SERVE*** THE ***EMPIRE.***

WE HAVE PLEDGED OUR LIVES TO IT, AND TO ITS SURVIVAL. IT IS ALL THAT MATTERS.

THE BILL HAS COME DUE, DAVIAN.

AND I DARE NOT PAY IT.

"OH, YOU CANNOT IMAGINE THOSE DAYS.

"FIRE AND STARS, RAY BLASTS AND STARDRIVE TRAILS. THE CYMBAL CLASH OF STEEL. THE OZONE SCENT OF BLASTER.

"SUCH GLORY.

"I CUT AN EMPIRE FROM THE RAW MEAT OF COUNTLESS WORLDS.

"HUMAN HEGEMONY STAMPED ON THE HEAVENS.

"TAMING A HUNDRED PLANETS, WRESTING THEM FROM THE COUNTLESS SAVAGE BEASTS THAT DOMINATED THEM.

"THERE WERE THOSE WHO, UPON BEING GRANTED THESE CONQUERED WORLDS TO SETTLE, OPPOSED MY RULE.

"DOOMED TO FAILURE, ALL OF THEM.

"WAS IT THE MIGHT OF MY ARMIES, THE STRENGTH OF MY SWORD ARM? THE BRILLIANCE OF MY STRATEGY? THE CHARISMA OF MY LEADERSHIP?

"NO.

"THEY WERE DESTINED TO FALL.

"I HAD SEEN THE FUTURE, AND--ENTHRONED IN THIS CLEAR, TRUE, AND PERFECT VISION--KNEW ALL THAT WAS TO COME. ALL THAT WOULD BE ***MINE***.

*MY TRIUMPH WAS INEVITABLE.

*ALL MY LIFE, I COULD PERCEIVE THE MECHANISM OF THE UNIVERSE, AND SO WAS GUIDED MY EVERY ACTION...

*...UNERRINGLY DRIVING ME TO MY DESTINY.

*NO. YOU CANNOT IMAGINE THOSE DAYS.

*AND FROM THE DEEPEST DARKNESS OF THAT UNEXPLORED INFINITY, A VOICE SPURRING ME ON, CALLING ME FORTH TO MEET IT.

*SO WE MOVED OUTWARD.

*MY ARMIES IN LOCKSTEP, CONTROLLED EN MASSE BY MY VOICE IN THEIR MINDS.

*SOLDIERS, SAILORS, ALL OF THEM MARCHING TO THE DRUMBEAT OF MY WILL, ALL TO ANSWER THAT CALL ONLY I COULD HEAR.

*FIND ME.

*FIND ME.

*FIND ME.

*WOE BETIDE ANY WHO STOOD AGAINST ME ON THAT PATH.

*THEIR DIRE FATES AS PREORDAINED AS MY ULTIMATE VICTORY, EITHER BENEATH THE BLASTS AND BLADES OF MY ARMIES...

*...OR THE INESCAPABLE POWER OF MY MIND.

"UNTIL ONE ADVERSARY ALONE REMAINED.

"NO ENGINE FAST ENOUGH, NO VICTORY QUICK ENOUGH, TO THWART THE RELENTLESS PASSAGE OF TIME.

"THE SCIENCE AND SKILL OF A HUNDRED WORLDS SUSTAINED ME AND STILL I COULD FEEL THE YEARS CATCHING ME. COULD FEEL MY STRENGTH LEAVING ME.

"AND STILL, THE CALL. OVER AND OVER AGAIN. THAT CALL, AND WHAT WOULD BE THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BARGAIN.

"FIND ME.

"I TRIED FOR A FINAL TIME TO ANSWER. A LEAP OF FAITH INTO THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE UNCHARTED VOID...

"...TO A PLACE WHERE THE WALLS BETWEEN TWO DIMENSIONS HAD WORN THIN.

"MY SCIENTISTS HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE NAVIGATIONAL HAZARDS THAT PLAGUED THIS AREA OF SPACE WERE NATURAL ANOMALIES IN THE SHAPE OF THE UNIVERSE.

"THEY WERE WRONG.

*THROUGH COUNTLESS YEARS AND INNUMERABLE WORLDS HAD I TRAVELED, AND THERE HAD BEEN NOTHING. NO MIND WORTH MEETING. NO VOICE TO HEAR.

*BUT IN THIS OTHER DIMENSION, WHERE THE LAWS OF OUR UNIVERSE DID NOT APPLY, I FOUND THEM. IN THIS PLACE, WHERE THE LAWS OF PHYSICS THAT RULED **ME** COULD BE FORCED TO THEIR KNEES, BOUND TO **MY** SERVICE.

*THEY SPOKE IN ONE VOICE, BUT IT WAS THE SCION OF THEIR RACE WHO GREETED ME, MADE BARGAIN WITH ME.

*REJUVENATION. IMMORTALITY. I COULD HAVE IT.

*IN RETURN, THEY WOULD EXPERIENCE OUR WORLDS THROUGH MY EYES.

*THIS WAS THE BARGAIN.

*WE WOULD BE ETERNAL, AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE AND SO ALL WOULD BENEFIT.

*THEY LIVED ONLY TO LEARN, TO EXPERIENCE. THEY HAD NO CONCEPT OF GUILE. THEY COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF DECEPTION.

*WHERE I WAS BENT ON ACHIEVING MY DESTINY, THEY SOUGHT ONLY THE NOVEL. NEWNESS WAS IRRESISTIBLE TO THEM, AND OUR DIMENSION WAS AN INFINITE SOURCE OF IT.

*WE MERGED.

*THEIR INNOCENCE GUTTED ON THE ALTAR OF MY DESTINY.

"IT WAS **NOT** EASY, NOR PAINLESS.

"BUT IT WAS NECESSARY.

"IN AN INSTANT, THE SCION SAW MY INTENTION AND KNEW MY DESIRE.

"THEY SAW ALL I HAD DONE AND ALL I DREAMT YET TO DO.

"AND THEY UNDERSTOOD **DECEIT.**

"BUT WE HAD BECOME **ONE** AND I WOULD **NOT** LET GO.

"THEY FOUGHT ME, THEY **FLENSED** ME, AND BY ACCIDENT OR DESIGN THEY **SCOURED** MY MIND OF MY **POWER.**

"IT WOULD TAKE MILLENNIA TO REGAIN WHAT I **LOST** THROUGH MY **CASSANDRAS.** BUT THAT WOULD COME.

"I AGAIN **HAD** TIME.

"THEN, THEY HAD TO KNOW **ABSOLUTELY** MY INTENTIONS.

"HAD TO KNOW THAT MY **RESOLVE** WAS **UNWAVERING.**

"THAT IF NEEDED, I WOULD EXTERMINATE EVERYTHING THEY HAD EVER KNOWN AND LOVED TO ACHIEVE MY ENDS.

"THEIR UNIVERSE WAS THE MEANS THROUGH WHICH MY EMPIRE WOULD GROW AND THRIVE.

"THEY KNEW MY **JOY.**

"AND THEY KNEW THEIR FUTURE. BOUND NOW AS WE WERE, BOUND AS WE ALWAYS WOULD BE..."

...THEIR PLACE AS PART OF THE EMPRESS ETERNAL, THE RULER OF THIS UNIVERSE, AND ONE DAY THEIR OWN.

NOW ITS OWN MUST ***END***, LEST ***OURS*** PERISH, DAVIAN.

WHY DIDN'T YOU SEE IT? SEE WHEN AND HOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN?

EVEN AT MY ***MOST*** POWERFUL, I COULD NOT CALCULATE THE POTENTIAL TEN MILLENNIA ALONG.

THE CASSANDRAS, THEN--

THE CASSANDRAS ARE ***SHADOWS*** OF THE POWER I LOST.

ALL OF THEM TOGETHER-- DESPITE THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF BREEDING AND MODIFICATION-- CAN BARELY MASTER ***YEARS***, LET ALONE ***DECADES***.

BUT DO **NOT** THINK THAT MADE ME **COMPLACENT** OR **IDLE.**

I HAVE SPENT **THOUSANDS** OF YEARS PREPARING TO **SECURE** OUR BORDERS.

IT SHOULD **NEVER** HAVE COME TO THIS. HYPERNOVA **DETONATIONS** IN T-SPACE.

I HAD **ANOTHER** WAY. AL-ASHANTI AND BUSINESSES LIKE THEM.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN **QUIET.** IT WOULD HAVE BEEN **SECRET.**

BUT IT DIDN'T WORK.

THE SCION HAS HAD A **LONG** TIME TO **LEARN.**

AND THEY ARE **NEVER** STILL, ONLY **SILENT** WITHIN ME.

TREACHERY BEGETS TREACHERY.

HOWEVER THEY MANAGED IT, I WAS **BETRAYED.**

SCIMITAR-3 MUST BE FOUND AND STOPPED, GENERAL.

IF NOT, THE SCION'S RACE--THE PHOBES--WILL WIPE THIS EMPIRE FROM THE FACE OF CREATION.

IT IS AS SIMPLE AS THAT.

SO I ASK YOU THIS: MAY THE EMPIRE RELY UPON YOUR SERVICE?

ALWAYS.

AS I SAID...

...WE ARE ALIKE.

NO ARMOR...

...NO SUPPORT...

...NO RESOURCES...

...BUT YOU CAN GO ***ANYWHERE***...

...SO ***WHERE*** DO YOU ***GO***...?

ELSIE, TAKE THE FOLLOWING. FULL ENCRYPTION.
READY.
TO CAPTAIN NAGANO, COMMANDING ADAMANT PURPOSE.
REQUIRE FORGED TEAM GLADIUS-6 READIED FOR IMMEDIATE DEPLOYMENT, COORDINATES TO FOLLOW...

ARE YOU READY?

READY AS CAN BE, I SUPPOSE.

WHEN YOU SCUTTLED YOUR ARMOR, YOU SCUTTLED YOUR WEAPONS.

CERTAINLY, YOU WILL ENCOUNTER RESISTANCE.

DO YOU INTEND TO BATTLE THE ENTIRETY OF THE TECHNION SPHERE HAND TO HAND?

NOT THE ENTIRETY.

HAHAHAHAHA!

VICTORY FOR US ALL.

VICTORY FOR US ALL.

STOP POSING, HAP.

I'M NOT! PUSH WANTED A PHYSICAL EXAM!

SHE IS KINDA POSING.

CAN I HELP IT IF I'M THE PRETTY ONE?

YOU'RE FIDGETING.

SORRY.

GIMME ANOTHER DEEP BREATH...

...GOOD.

SO WHAT DO YOU GOT?

SHE'S FINE. SHE'S FUCKING ***GREAT***, IN FACT, AT LEAST BEST I CAN TELL WITHOUT MY GEAR TO LOOK INSIDE.

SAME FOR JO AND HARPO, TOO.

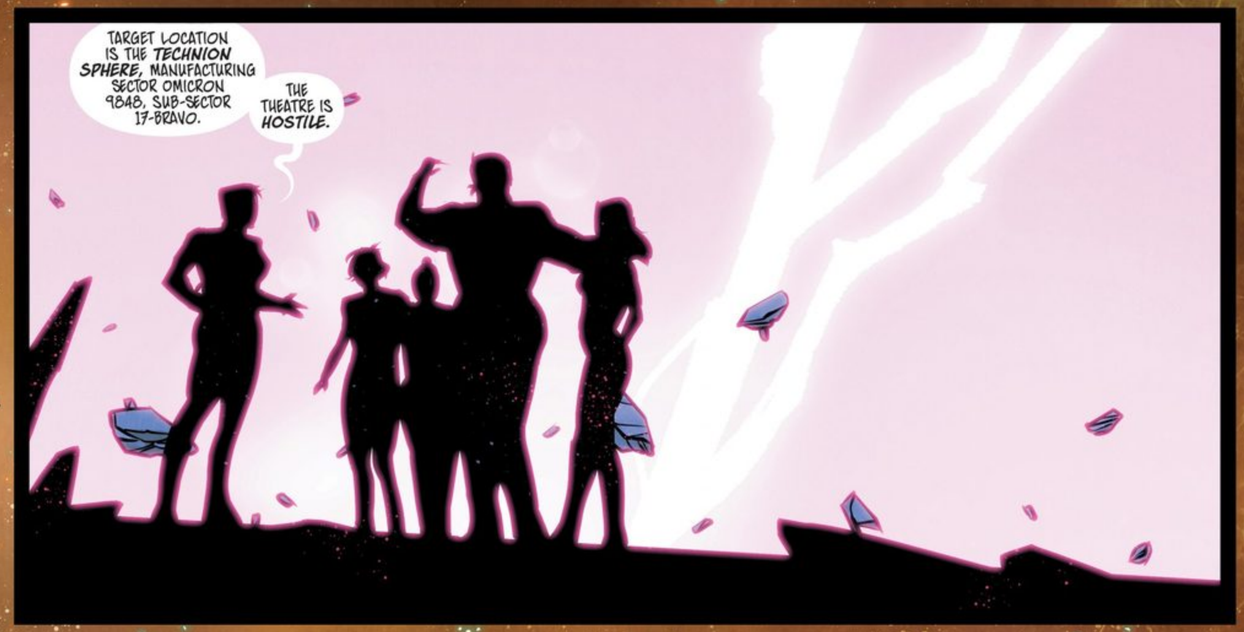
SYMBIOSIS SEEMS TO HAVE ***NO*** ILL EFFECTS...

...AND IN FACT SOME NOTABLE ***BENEFITS.***

HELL YEAH. FELT WEIRD AT FIRST. NOW IT JUST SEEMS... NORMAL?

I FEEL LIKE I CAN CLAW THROUGH A BATTLESHIP HULL.

ALL RIGHT, CIRCLE UP.


TARGET LOCATION IS THE TECHNION SPHERE, MANUFACTURING SECTOR OMICRON 984B, SUB-SECTOR 17-BRAVO.
THE THEATRE IS HOSTILE.

WE WILL INSERT VIA DIRECT T-SPACE TRANSIT WITH THE COOPERATION OF OUR PHOBE SYMBIOTES...

...IN EFFECT STEPPING US STRAIGHT TO TARGET.

OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO DESTROY THE EMPIRE'S ABILITY TO THREATEN T-SPACE.
I REPEAT, TO DESTROY THE EMPIRE'S ABILITY TO THREATEN T-SPACE.

NORMALLY, NOW I'D SAY, "FOR THE EMPIRE," OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
AND YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT STANDS.

FOR THE EMPIRE!

WELL, DAMN.

FUCK ME.

THAT'S ONE WAY TO TRAVEL.

IT IS...

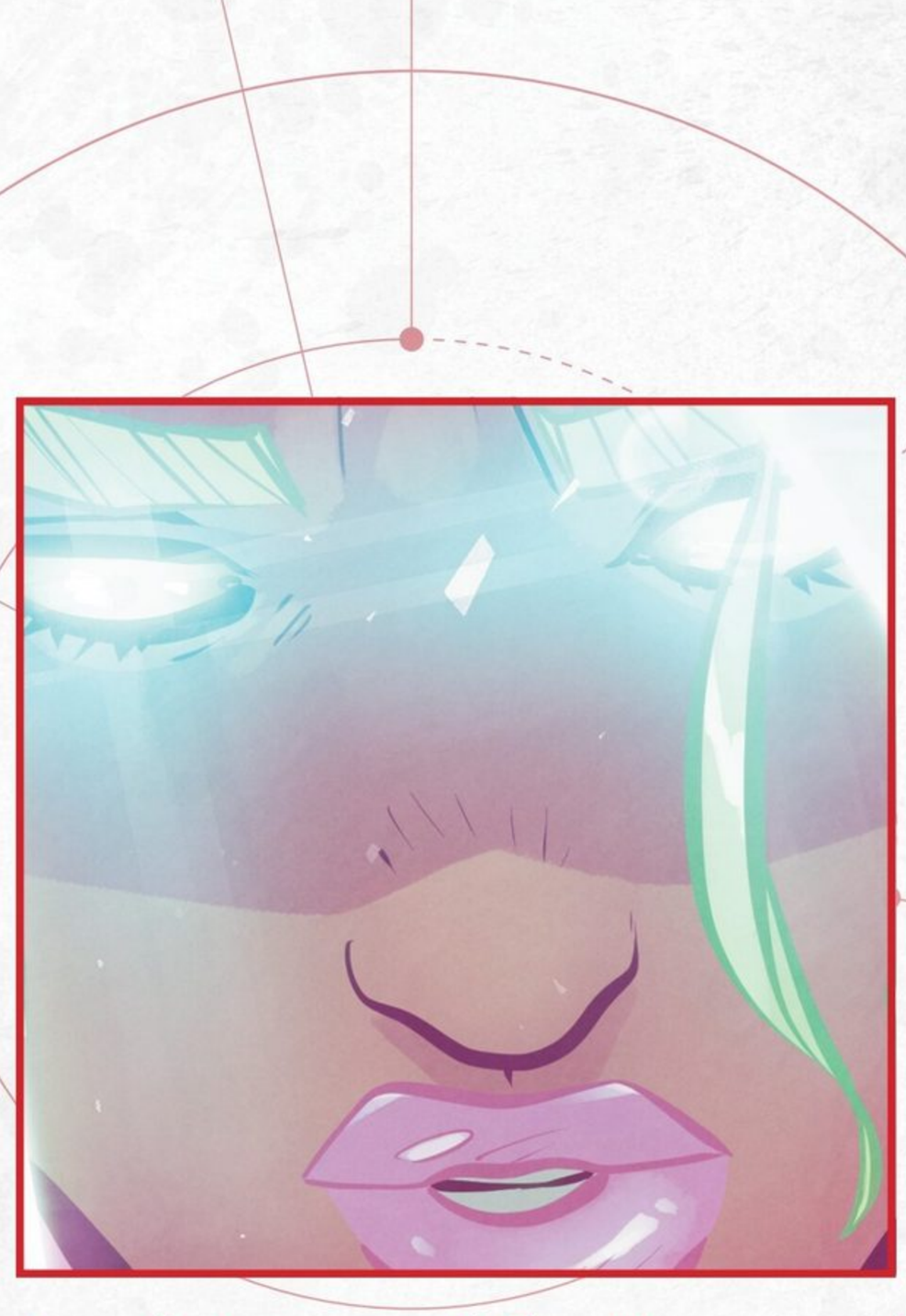
...TOO BAD FOR YOU IT'S A ONE-WAY TRIP...

NEXT ISSUE:

Vic and Scimitar-3 launch their campaign against the Eternal and learn more about what their new symbiosis with the Phobes means; Hap has a close encounter; the Empress has an argument; and Scythe and Viper make their return, looking to settle the score with their treasonous sisters.

June 10, 2026

image®



"She supects, sister...and the Empress is **afraid.**"

Adventure / SciFi / Space Opera

RATED **M** / MATURE

ZONE